



Lord Shiva Invoked in Prayer and Music



As each year, the Maha Shivaratri celebration at Chinmaya Rameshwaram was a grand one. Planning for the festival began weeks in advance with volunteers coordinating the spread out congregation that is so unique to Southern California. The week prior to the auspicious day of Monday, February 20 was filled with the chanting and singing of the Lord's name.

The Shiva Laksharchana saw participation from members of the satellite centers, another day had parents from Rameshwaram participating. Volunteers, teachers and parents of bala vihar children all eagerly took part in the puja.

On Maha Shivaratri day itself, the day long celebrations began in the morning with the mahanyasa parayana at 6:30 am, followed by the ekadasha rudra homam, officiated by Pandit Sivaramakrishnan of the Sanatana Dharma Temple. Eleven ritviks chanted the Sri Rudram 11 times and abhishekam was offered to the Shiva Lingam with 11 different dravyas.

The evening festivities began with the dharma abhishekam from 6 pm allowing all devotees to offer milk abhishekam to the Lord. Over 600 devotees thronged Rameshwaram bringing milk, fruits, honey and flowers as offering.

The Shruti group of children, sang bhajans invoking Ganesha, Guru and Devi along with Shiva bhajans like Hara Hara Shankara and Bhola Shankar. Swaranjali, began with Manasa Bhaja Re, a rendition in praise of the Guru, going on to sing Hara Hara Hara Mahadeva, Shiva Bol and Shambo Mahadeva among other bhajans, setting the mood for all the devotees present.

In keeping with the belief that the devotee who stays awake during Maha Shivaratri and offers prayers to the Lord is sure to attain salvation, the late night observance of Shivaratri began at 9 pm, again with the chanting of the Sri Rudram by the congregation. Each round of chanting was interspersed with melodious bhajans and shlokas like Lingashtakam, Nirvana Shatakam and Shiva Manasa Puja, led by Swami Ishwarananda which continued until midnight when the final Mangala aarti concluded the day long observance.

Shivaratri Marked at Redlands

The chanting of Sri Rudram and Chamakam as well as puja to the Lord was conducted in all its formalities at the Redlands center. Bala vihar children chanted shlokas and sang bhajans learned in class. It was an intimate event that brought members together for Shivaratri.



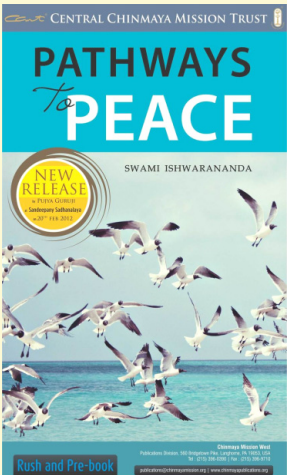
Saraswati Puja at Edward-Dean Museum

The Edward-Dean Museum & Gardens in Cherry Valley on Feb. 19 celebrated the festival of Vasanth Panchami. The museum which features 16th- 19th century European and Asian decorative arts aimed to bring the mainstream community members in and provide a glimpse of this Hindu festival dedicated to the Ma Saraswati. While there were music and dance performances, a kite flying workshop and other cultural items, the Saraswati puja itself was conducted and performed by children of the Redlands Balvihar.



Guruji Releases Swami Ishwarananda's Book

At the auspicious Maha Shivaratri celebrations held in Sandeepany in Mumbai, Guruji Swami Tejomayananda released the book 'Pathways to Peace,' by Swami Ishwarananda. The book has been re-edited and beautifully re-designed. Orders for this slim volume, which albeit holds weighty information that is inspirational, can be ordered at the Rameshwaram bookstore.



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